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SUMMARY OF S. 1666

PURPOSE: To amend title 5, U.S. Code, to provide for the extension of physicians comparability allowances, and to amend title 37, U.S. Code, to provide for special pay for psychologists in the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service.

SOURCE: Introduced by Senator Stevens on August 7, 1987. Passed by the Senate, with an amendment, on September 16, 1987

BACKGROUND: The Federal Physicians Comparability Allowance Act of 1978 (PL 95-603) authorizes Federal agencies experiencing problems recruiting and retaining physicians to enter into service agreements with physicians in return for special allowances. These allowances range up to a maximum of \$7,000 or \$10,000, depending on length of previous government service. The authority to enter into such agreements originally expired on September 30, 1979, but was later extended for two years by PL 96-166, then for another two years by PL 97-141, and then for four years by PL 98-168. The present authority for entering into such agreements expires on September 30, 1987, and no agreement may extend beyond September 30, 1989.

As of May 1986, 948 of 1,562 physicians employed by the Federal government were receiving a physicians comparability allowance, averaging \$8,102.

On August 21, 1987, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) submitted a legislative proposal to extend the program for another three years. OPM also proposed two changes in the program. One change would increase the maximum allowance from \$7,000 to \$14,000 for physicians with less than two years service, and from \$10,000 to \$20,000 for physicians with more than two years service. The second change would provide that service as a physician in the Veterans Administration's Department of Medicine and Surgery and in the Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service would count toward the two-year service requirement.

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EXPLANATION: Section 1 of S. 1666 amends section 5948(a) of title 5, U.S. Code, to increase the maximum allowances payable to Federal physicians as proposed by OPM. The section also provides that service as a physician in the Veterans Administration's Department of Medicine and Surgery, or active service as a medical officer in the Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service under Title II of the Public Health Service Act, shall be deemed to be service as a Government physician. Section 1 also extends through September 30, 1990, the period during which agencies may enter into service agreements with physicians, and extends through September 30, 1992, the period of service that may be covered by such agreements.

Section 2 amends title 37 of the U.S. Code to establish special pay, varying with length of service, for psychologists in the Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service who have been certified by the American Board of Professional Psychology.

COST: OPM estimates that the amendments contained in section 1 of the bill will result in additional costs of approximately \$3 million per year, which would be absorbed by the employing agencies.